



Absolute and Relative

Chapters 16, 17 and 18 of Marx's Capital Volume 1 (**attached**) have very interesting things to say about absolute and relative Surplus-Value, and the old political economists' mistakes about it. Here are some of the points made by Karl Marx:

*“Capitalist production is not merely the production of commodities, it is essentially the production of surplus-value. The labourer produces, not for himself, but for capital. It no longer suffices, therefore, that he should simply produce. He must produce surplus-value. That labourer alone is productive, who produces surplus-value for the capitalist, **and thus works for the self-expansion of capital.**”*

“The production of absolute surplus-value turns exclusively upon the length of the working-day; the production of relative surplus-value, revolutionises out and out the technical processes of labour, and the composition of society. It therefore pre-supposes a specific mode, the capitalist mode of production, a mode which, along with its methods, means, and conditions, arises and develops itself spontaneously on the foundation afforded by the formal

subjection of labour to capital. In the course of this development, the formal subjection is replaced by the real subjection of labour to capital.”

“Assuming that labour-power is paid for at its value, we are confronted by this alternative: given the productiveness of labour and its normal intensity, the rate of surplus-value can be raised only by the actual prolongation of the working-day; on the other hand, given the length of the working-day, that rise can be effected only by a change in the relative magnitudes of the components of the working-day, viz., necessary labour and surplus-labour; a change which, if the wages are not to fall below the value of labour-power, presupposes a change either in the productiveness or in the intensity of the labour.”

*“Bourgeois economists instinctively saw, and rightly so, that **it is very dangerous to stir too deeply the burning question of the origin of surplus-value.**”*

*“Capital, therefore, is not only, as Adam Smith says, the command over labour. It is essentially the command over unpaid labour. All surplus-value, whatever particular form (profit, interest, or rent), it may subsequently crystallize into, is in substance the materialization of unpaid labour. **The secret of the self-expansion of capital** resolves itself into having the disposal of a definite quantity of other people's unpaid labour.”*

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Capital V1, C16, 17, 18, Absolute and Relative Surplus Value](#).
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